

CHURCH NEUTRAL IN POLITICS ARCHBISHOP ASSURES COLDWELL

Reply To Farmer-Labor Leader's Complaint Voices Regret At Wilcox Incident

The following is the text of the communications between Archbishop J. C. McGuigan of Regina and M. J. Coldwell, Farmer-Labor leader, dealing with Mr. Coldwell's complaint of the action of Rev. Athol Murray, principal of Notre Dame University at Wilcox in requiring two students to withdraw from the C.C.F. under penalty of expulsion.

MR. COLDWELL'S LETTER

Mr. Coldwell's letter to the archbishop follows:

His Grace Monsignor McGuigan,
Archbishop of Regina,
Regina, Sask.

Your Grace: Wide publicity has been given to the threatened expulsion by the Rev. Athol Murray of two students of the Notre Dame university at Wilcox, Sask., if they retain their association with the C.C.F. club at that point. In view of the tragic controversies between Protestants and Catholics in past years, our organization has urged its membership to the exercise of forbearance at the hostile attitude of many of the parish priests of your church. We readily grant that they have their rights of citizenship to become associated with any political party they favor, but we strongly protest when they use their sacerdotal influence against a party founded on the same basis as that of the British Socialist movement, which His Eminence Cardinal Archbishop Bourne has referred to as a "bulwark of Christianity itself." Moreover, the encyclical condemns the abuses of capitalism and especially denounces the Liberalistic philosophy of the Manchester school, from which Canadian Liberal leaders derive their inspiration. Yet, Mr. Patrick O'Dwyer of the Notre Dame university at Wilcox, appears on various Liberal platforms preaching Liberalism without let or hindrance; Liberal ex-ministers defend capitalism and proclaim the virtues of the competitive society, but no sacerdotal influence is exerted to prejudice the adherents of the Roman Catholic church against the official party of Liberalism or its counterpart, the Liberal-Conservative party.

Some months ago you intimated that your church in Saskatchewan would exercise neutrality in our political life as long as religious freedom was not threatened. We have very consistently refrained from attacking priests like Father Murray or the editors of certain Roman Catholic papers which have tried to influence their co-religionists against us, because we had confidence in your grace's attitude.

We are interested, profoundly interested, in changing our economic structure so that it may minister to the needs of society and distribute more equitably the abundance which Providence has showered upon us in this scientific age. All we ask for in the realm of religion is fair play and freedom to promulgate our humanitarian policies without religious interference or prejudice. I am writing your grace, therefore, because I have confidence that you will be fair enough, and far-sighted enough, to see that a continuance of such wanton discrimination as that shown by Father Murray will inevitably lead to a situation which we are using every effort to avoid.

Trusting you will consider this communication in the spirit of religious peace and harmony which prompts it and favor me with a re-

ply at the earliest possible moment, I have the honor to be, sir,

Yours sincerely,

M. J. COLDWELL.

ARCHBISHOP'S REPLY

The archbishop's reply to Mr. Coldwell's letter reads:

My dear Mr. Coldwell:

I have duly received your letter of May 17 and fully appreciate the motives that prompted you to write me—motives—you are good enough to state—which are based on the desire for religious peace and harmony in this province.

I regret the incident to which you refer and the many sided comments it has caused. In your letter you make it clear that what you ask of me and the clergy is neutrality in political questions. As head of the Catholic church in this province, I am indeed anxious to keep the church independent of and outside of all political parties. I do not sanction any other policy. I am firmly determined not to be drawn into the political field.

As the Archbishop of Regina, I have never favored or disfavored, approved or condemned any political party. My work as the spiritual leader of my devoted flock is above and outside of all political groups or party factions.

While the church is not interested in the fortunes of any political party, she is profoundly interested in the social and economic problems of the people committed to her spiritual care, especially in so far as these problems have a bearing on religion and on moral conduct. In these matters, we of this church province have been guided by the encyclical letters "Rerum Novarum" of Pope Leo XIII. and "Quadragesimo Anno" of Pope Pius XI. In a joint pastoral letter of February 2, 1934, addressed to the Catholic people of this province, my brother-bishops and I gave the direction that these documents be carefully studied by our people, and in this study we have asked pastors of souls to take the lead. I quote from the pastoral: "The duty of leading rests primarily upon pastors of souls. Their first work, therefore, is to study the social questions and be thoroughly informed on the social program of the church. Then they must teach and influence their people—such influence, however, to be independent of, outside of, and above all political factions."

The clergy and faithful of my jurisdiction know that it is my wish that no priest use his sacred office to influence his people politically. I have definitely stated my wishes in this regard on several occasions. As private citizens, however, the clergy have the right of forming their own judgment and of voting according to the dictates of their conscience, which is a right of every citizen of this free country. There is no desire to interfere with this native right of every son of Canada.

It may be pertinent to note that the bishop of a diocese is the only authoritative voice in his own jurisdiction. It follows, therefore, that the statements or attitude of any individual Catholic, be he priest or layman, should not be taken as the voice or the attitude of the church.

With regard to the specific incidents in question, I am investigating them according to the usual norms of church procedure.

I need hardly assure you, dear Mr. Coldwell, that I am most anxious for religious harmony and peace among all classes of our province. Furthermore, I feel sure that this is the general desire of all fellow citizens, however they may differ in their political views.

Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) JAMES C. McCUTGAN,
Archbishop of Regina.

